

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Archaeology: Biblical Ally or Adversary?

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Christians used to assume, quite confidently, that the spade was the Bible's best friend, and that the hard evidence unearthed by archaeologists digging in the Holy Land would, once the dust of controversy was cleaned off, unfailingly support the Biblical record. Early excavations in the Near East were often funded by Christian organizations, and the portrait of a faith-filled archaeologist marching off to his dig with Bible in one hand and a spade in the other was quite familiar. Archaeological greats like William Foxwell Albright virtually invented the discipline called "Biblical Archaeology," so assured were they that "the stones" would indeed "cry out" the truth of Scripture.

A series of stunning archaeological discoveries that directly corroborated places, personalities, and events in the Old and New Testaments only confirmed the general impression that Biblical records were historically very reliable. Journals like *Biblical Archaeology Review* and *Bible and Spade* implied as much in their very titles.

Over the past decade, however, a strong counter-current has developed among some scholars of the Near East that claims quite the opposite. A group often styled as "Biblical minimalists" sees little or no correlation between archaeological and Biblical evidence, and thus no reliable history in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). Leading spokesmen among the minimalists are Thomas L. Thompson and Niels P. Lemche of the University of Copenhagen, with like-minded, postmodernist colleagues in both hemispheres.

In 2001, a revisionist archaeologist with similar views, Israel Finkelstein, penned, with Neal A. Silberman, a widely-read book: *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. This "new vision" controverts traditional Jewish and Christian views of both the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible as well as how it came to be. An even more popular vetting of this "vision" was a much-discussed article written by Daniel Lazare in the March 1, 2002 issue of *Harper's Magazine*. One-sided, trenchant, and biased in the extreme, the article follows a sensationalist title that says it all: *False Testament: Archaeology Refutes the Bible's Claim to History*. Since *Harper's* has a proud history going back to Abraham Lincoln's time, which lends credibility to its contents, many more conservative Jewish and Christian readers are now alarmed that the very foundations of their faith are called into question.

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This (*non*-sensationalist) article will examine the claims made by Lazare and other revisionist critics, weigh them against the results of main stream Biblical archaeology and scholarship, and then find them decisively wanting in both substance and methodology.

Assault on the Old Testament

The new criticism of the Scriptural record is corrosive and categorical from beginning to end. Abraham? There is no evidence that any such personality as Abraham ever lived, so they claim, or even *could* have lived in their new version of ancient Israelite origins. Accordingly, there was no migration from Mesopotamia to any “promised land.” Stories about the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were cobbled together out of various bits of early local lore. Moses had no more historical reality than Abraham, for there was no Israelite Sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus was a fiction. Nor did Joshua conquer “the promised land,” since the ancient Israelites were an indigenous culture already living in that land.

But what about the monarchs Saul, David, and Solomon and their regional empires? Surely they were historical, not? No, they were probably invented by Jerusalem priests in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, according to this revisionism. In the words of Lazare, if David *is* historical, he was not a mighty potentate whose power was felt from the Nile to the Euphrates but rather a freebooter who carved out what was at most a small duchy in the southern highlands around Jerusalem and Hebron. Indeed, the chief disagreement among scholars nowadays is between those who hold that David was a petty hilltop chieftain whose writ extended no more than few miles in any direction and a small but vociferous band of “Biblical minimalists” who maintain that he never existed at all (Lazare 2002:40).

There never was a united Hebrew monarchy in this overcritical view, and the architectural accomplishments of David and Solomon should rather be ascribed to King Ahab of Israel, according to Israel Finkelstein. As for religious beliefs, monotheistic Judaism was itself a late development—again in contrast to Biblical evidence—when also the heroic stories of the patriarchs and judges were crafted to show that Israel owned the land by rite of conquest. Probably not until we reach King Hezekiah in the 700s BC do the extreme critics begin to grant historicity to the Old Testament narratives.

This attack on Old Testament Scripture is thus of a full-fledged, no-holds-barred variety. Because of such extreme views, it would be easy to dismiss this assault as the work of a cadre of sensation-seeking quasi-scholars whose radical revisionism almost guarantees attention in the media, a trail well blazed, for example, by members of the so-called Jesus Seminar and their notorious votes on whether Jesus could have said or done something credited to him in the Gospels. And while sensationalism *is* difficult to deny in the case

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of the more radical Biblical minimalists, the balance of such scholars base their case almost entirely on archaeological evidence, indeed, on what they deem the *absence* of archaeological evidence corroborating material in the earlier eras of the Old Testament. We must now examine their allegations more closely.



SPC John F. Shaw

The ziggurat at Ur. The best preserved of the Mesopotamian ziggurats, or temple towers, it was built about the time of Abraham in ca. 2100 BC and remained in use until the Persian Period, ca. 539–332 BC. The interior is of sun dried mud bricks while the exterior is a facing of baked bricks set in bitumen mortar, about 2.5 m (8 ft) thick. It had three stories, the first accessible by three monumental staircases. The lowest story is 60 m (200 ft) long by 46 m (150 ft) wide and about 15 m (50 ft) high. From this rose the upper stories, each one smaller than the one below. On top stood a small one-roomed temple to the moon god Nanna.

False Claims

Abraham a Myth?

Even his hometown, Ur of the Chaldees (Gn 11:31), used to be denied by early critics in the 1800s. That is, until the systematic excavations of Sir Leonard Woolley from 1922–1934 uncovered the immense ziggurat or temple tower at Ur near the mouth of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. The name Abraham itself is a Semitic formation, and the various nationalities the patriarch encountered, as recorded in Genesis, are entirely consistent with the peoples known at that time and place. Other details in the Biblical account regarding Abraham, such as the treaties he made with neighboring rulers and even the price of slaves, mesh well with what is known elsewhere in the history of the ancient Near East (Kitchen 1995).

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No Migration from Mesopotamia?

Semitic tribes of the time were continually moving into and out of Mesopotamia. In fact, Abraham's trek into the "Promised Land" along a route up the Euphrates valley to Haran in southern Anatolia—which has also been identified and excavated—and then down through Syria to Canaan is geographically accurate: using that Fertile Crescent route was the only way to travel successfully from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in those days.

The Patriarchs?

Nothing in the Genesis account contradicts the nomadic way of life, replete with flocks and herds, that was characteristic of life in the 19th or 18th centuries BC. The agreements and contracts of the time, finding a bride from members of the same tribe, and other customs are well known elsewhere in the ancient Near East. To argue that the patriarchs did not exist because their names have not been found archaeologically is merely an argument from silence—the weakest form of argumentation that can be used. As fair-minded historians put it, "Absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence."



On the walls of a rock-cut tomb on the Nile's eastern shore is recorded an apparently special event from the life of the tomb's owner, Khnumhotep, governor of Upper Egypt's Antelope nome. Called Beni Hasan today, it is 250 km (160 mi) south of Cairo. In full color appears an Asiatic/Canaanite/Syro-Palestinian clan entering Egypt around 1900 BC. A representative group of eight men, four women and three children are depicted being presented to the governor, with the inscription giving the total number in the caravan as 37. Their yellow skin color and the accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions indicate they are Asiatics/Canaanites. Apparently an extended family, it suggests a scene surely similar to the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt (Gn 46:26). The Egyptians are depicted wearing their standard white clothing, while all but two of the Asiatics wear colorful garments, reminiscent of Joseph's multi-colored coat (Gn 37:3). The Egyptian men are mostly clean-shaven while the Asiatic/Canaanite men have full pointed beards. No one suggests this is actually Jacob's family, but it comes from the same region and at the same time that Jacob entered Egypt. While not proving the Biblical story, it perfectly portrays what the Bible describes.

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No Israelite Sojourn in Egypt or Exodus Therefrom?

Critics make much of the supposed “fact” that there is no mention of the Hebrews in hieroglyphic inscriptions, no mention of Moses, and no records of such a mass population movement as claimed in the Biblical Exodus from Egypt. The premise, of course, is questionable. The famous “Israel stele” of Pharaoh Merneptah, described more fully below, states, “Israel—his seed is not.” Furthermore, even if there were no mention whatever of the Hebrews in Egyptian records, this also would prove nothing, especially in view of the well-known Egyptian proclivity *never* to record reverses or defeats, nothing that would embarrass the majesty of the monarch in charge. Would any pharaoh there have had the following chiseled onto his monument: “Under my administration, a great horde of Hebrew slaves escaped successfully into the Sinai Desert when we tried to prevent them”?

In fact, the ancient Egyptians transformed some of their reverses into “victories.” One of the most imposing monuments in Egypt consists of four seated colossi of Rameses II overlooking the Nile (now Lake Nasser) at Abu-Simbel. Rameses erected these to overawe Ethiopians to the south who had heard—correctly—that he had barely escaped with his life at the battle of Kadesh against the Hittites, and so they thought Egypt ripe for invasion. But the story told on the walls inside this monument was that of a marvelous Egyptian victory!

No Moses?

The very name is Egyptian, as witness pharaonic names like *Thut-mose*, *Ra-meses*, and the ambient life as described in Genesis and Exodus is entirely consonant with what we know of ancient Egypt in the Hyksos and Empire periods: the food, the feasts, everyday life, customs, the names of locations, the local deities, and the like are familiar in both Hebrew and Egyptian literature.¹

No Exodus?

To be sure, few remains of encampments or artifacts from that era have been discovered archaeologically in the Sinai, but a nomadic, tribal migration is hardly known for leaving behind permanent stone foundations of imposing buildings en route. Hardly any

¹ A considerable, and growing, body of literature exists on the Hebrews in Egypt, the role of Joseph, the pharaoh who befriended him, the Hyksos, the Pharaoh of the Oppression, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and the Exodus itself. See recent issues of *Bible and Spade*, especially 16.1 (Winter 2003). Free and Vos 1992:69–105 is also helpful, as is Hoerth 1999.

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archaeology is taking place in the Sinai, and if this changes, evidence of migration may very well be uncovered. Again, beware the argument from silence.

No Conquest of Canaan by Joshua?

The “Battle of Jericho” continues to be fought! When Dame Kathleen Kenyon excavated at Jericho in the 1950s, she claimed not to find any collapsed walls or even evidence of a living city at Jericho during the time of Joshua’s invasion—nothing for him to conquer! She did indeed find *an earlier*, heavily fortified Jericho that ca. 1550 BC was subject to a violent conquest—fallen walls and a burnt ash layer a yard thick indicating destruction by fire—but that was before Joshua and the Israelites arrived (Kenyon 1957; 1981). Critics immediately seized on this as solid evidence that Joshua’s Conquest of Jericho must have been folklore.

Archaeologist Bryant G. Wood, however, editor of *Bible and Spade*, found that Kenyon had misdated her finds, and that the destruction of Jericho actually took place in the 1400s BC, when Joshua was very much on the scene, according to earlier (1400 rather than 1200 BC) datings of the Israelite invasion. In a brilliant 1990 article in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Wood bases his chronology on stratigraphy, pottery types, carbon-14 datings, and other evidence, including collapsed walls, to show a rather surprising archaeological confirmation of the Biblical detail recorded in Joshua 6 (Wood 1990).

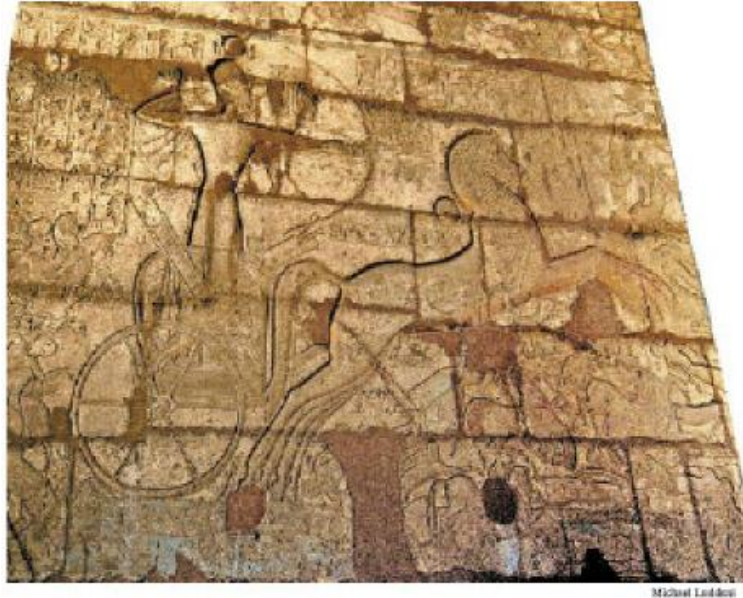
Kings David and Solomon Barely Historical or Even Mythical?

Again the critics rely much too heavily on the argument from silence or absence. For all the wealth and grandeur of their reigns, they contend, some of the golden goblets and other luxurious items from the palaces of David or Solomon should have come to light in the excavations, but they have not. As Lazare complains:

Yet not one goblet, not one brick, has ever been found to indicate that such a reign existed. If David and Solomon had been important regional power brokers, one might reasonably expect their names to crop up on monuments and in the diplomatic correspondence of the day. Yet once again the record is silent (Lazare 2002:45–46).

This contention, however, is hopelessly flawed because of one simple fact: Jerusalem has been destroyed and rebuilt some 15 or 20 times since the days of David and Solomon, each conquest taking its toll of valuable artifacts in particular. And what, pray tell, did Belshazzar set out as tableware for his famous feast in Babylon (Dn 5)? Gold and silver cups that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem!

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Rameses II at the battle of Kadesh depicted on the walls of the Ramesseum, his mortuary temple in West Thebes in southern Egypt. In his second year, ca. 1275 BC, Rameses II led the Egyptian army north to engage the Hittites at Kadesh in modern Syria. Rameses was duped by two spies into believing the Hittite army was 160 km (100 mi) further north, when in actual fact it was lying in wait at Kadesh. Caught by surprise, Rameses narrowly escaped death or capture thanks to his elite guard and approaching nightfall. The next day the Egyptian army regrouped and engaged the Hittites, with the battle ending in a stalemate. In the Egyptian records, however, the outcome was portrayed as a great victory for Rameses. The king is shown in huge scale in relation to the other figures in the scene. Rameses' chariot is pulled by two horses and slain Hittite warriors are depicted all around him.

As for David's name itself, "the record is silent" no longer. In 1993, Archaeologist Avraham Biran, digging at Tel Dan in northern Israel, discovered a victory stele in three stone chunks on which David's name is inscribed, the first archaeological reference to David outside of the Old Testament. The Aramaic inscription contains a boast by the king of Damascus (probably Hazael) that he has defeated the king of Israel (probably Joram, son of Ahab) and the king of "the house of David" (probably Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, ca. 842 BC) (Shanks 1999:44).

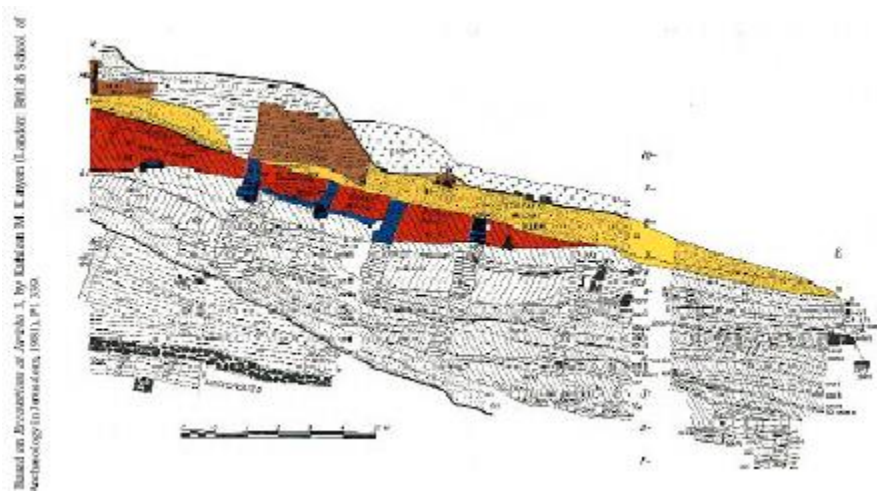
This discovery alone should have quieted minimalist claims that there was no David. But never underestimate the rigidity of minds locked onto a track record of impossible revisionism! That sad fraternity is still trying desperately to retranslate the message on the stele, or even claim that the name David is a forgery — folly compounding folly!

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King Ahab of Israel as the Master Builder Rather than David and Solomon?

This is a favorite conclusion of archaeologist Israel Finkelstein, but, then, please note that his archaeological time grid differs from the standard model by some 150 years. And, what do you know: David, at 1000 BC minus 150 years brings us down to the 850s and Ahab! It would be tempting to invoke the old computer slogan at this point—"Garbage in, garbage out"—but I shall opt for the higher road and refrain from doing so.

Finally, one is struck by the sudden silence of the revisionist critics from about the time of King Hezekiah (fl. 700 BC) on. From that point, evidently, the Old Testament instantly becomes "more historical" for them, and this concession, of course, is forced on them because of the overwhelming number of correlations from archaeology, records of surrounding nations, and ancient history in general that fully corroborate the Biblical evidence. The Assyrians did not conquer mythical northern Israelites in 722 BC, nor did Nebuchadnezzar deport into the Babylonian Captivity a legendary, folkloric band of Jews who never existed. We leave it to the critics to explain how fact suddenly emerges out of supposed fantasy in the Old Testament.



Section drawing of Jericho excavations. Shown here is a drawing of the north balk (vertical side) of Kenyon's Areas HII and HIII. The portions in blue are the walls and floors of the final Bronze Age city destroyed by Joshua at the end of the 15th century B.C. The red area is the burned ash layer resulting from the Israelites setting fire to the city (Jos 6:24). Above that is an erosional layer, shown in yellow, from a period of abandonment after the destruction (Jos 6:26). Structures dating to the second half of the 14th century BC (brown) were constructed on the erosional layer, corresponding to the period of Eglon, king of Moab (Jgs 3:12–13). The archaeological findings at Jericho perfectly match the Biblical records.

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Wrong Methodology

In dealing with specifics such as the above, the errors in content, procedure, and even logic employed by the revisionist critics are more than apparent, and might be listed as follows:

- 1) The overuse of arguments from silence or absence of archaeological evidence. Such arguments have often been rendered moot by subsequent discoveries that provide such “missing” evidence.
- 2) Assuming that archaeology can tell us more than is warranted by the finds. Archaeology is not the only source of historical evidence.
- 3) Assuming that archaeology is dispassionate and objective, whereas some excavators are anything but. Unfortunately, recent political pressures have also impinged on the discipline.
- 4) Assuming that there is agreement among archaeologists as to time grids involving strata uncovered and the artifacts therein. In fact, their interpretations of excavated evidence often differ widely.
- 5) Suggesting that revisionist criticism represents the latest and best views of where scholarship and archaeology are today in terms of “the latest research” on Biblical origins. In sober fact, recent issues of journals like *Biblical Archaeology Review* and *Bible and Spade* are crammed with criticism of the minimalist position, and the debate between traditional and radical views among Biblical scholars continues to rage, even as this is written.
- 6) Condoning reports, like Lazare’s in *Harper’s*, which are so hopelessly one-sided that bias fairly screams out in every other paragraph.
- 7) As is the case with extremists in any discipline, opting for sensation rather than sense.
- 8) Using results very selectively rather than balancing off *all* the evidence. Failure to evaluate or even misrepresent evidence on the “other side” results in torque, not truth.

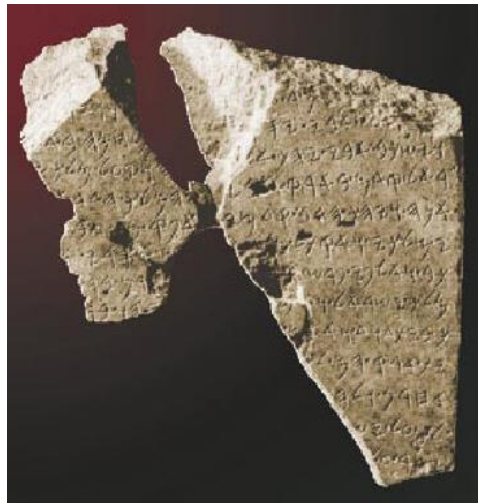
This is not to claim that there are no problems in the Old Testament record. Even traditionalists will admit that there certainly are. We can all fondly wish that the Book of Genesis had given us the names of more contemporary associates of Abraham so that the whole patriarchal era could be dated with more precision. And why, oh why don’t we have the actual names of the Egyptian kings involved in the Oppression and the Exodus rather than only their generic title, “Pharaoh”? Later on, the Old Testament will readily give us the proper names of pharaohs like Shishak (fl. 920 BC, 1 Kgs 14:25 f.) and Necho

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(fl. 600 BC, 2 Kgs 23:29 ff.). Had such individual names appeared in Exodus, we would have been spared hundreds of tomes and thousands of articles debating their identity. And throughout, of course, we all lust for more specific detail about the Hebrews in the period pre-1000 BC and would likely sacrifice whole chapters of Jewish ceremonial law in Leviticus and Deuteronomy in exchange for this.

Perhaps, though, we are asking too much of early sacred records. As it is, no religion or culture on earth has, in fact, *more specificity* in its earliest historical records than the Torah. And it is always the case that the earliest records of any peoples will be more spotty and compressed than the later ones. Certainly we see in the Old and New Testaments, not a progressive historicity in the sense that the earlier records are not historical and the later records are—as the radical revisionists claim—but rather a *progressive historical specificity*.

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Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem

Recovered fragments of the Tel Dan Stela. Discovered in 1993 and 1994 at Tel Dan, Israel, the stela (inscribed stone monument) tells of the victory of a king of Aram (the area of modern Syria) over “the king of Israel” and “the House of David.” King David’s dynasty, commonly referred to in the Bible as “the House of David,” ruled the Southern Kingdom from their capital at Jerusalem. Based on the archaeological context and the paleography (shape of the letters) the stela can be dated to the mid-ninth century BC. It most likely commemorates the victory of Hazael, king of Aram, over Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, at Ramoth Gilead in 841 BC recorded in 2 Kings 8:28–29. Since this discovery, the name of David has been found on two other inscriptions (Kitchen 2003:92–93).

Accordingly, to use terms like “false testament” for the Hebrew Bible and to vaporize its earlier personalities into non-existence has no justification whatever in terms of the mass of geographical, archaeological, and historical evidence that correlates so admirably with Scripture.

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The Factual Evidence

Archaeological finds that contradict the contentions of Biblical minimalists and other revisionists have been listed above. But there are many, many more that corroborate Biblical evidence, and following is a list of only the most significant discoveries:

A Common Flood Story

Not just the Hebrews (Gn 6–8), but Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and Greeks all report a flood in primordial times. A Sumerian king list from ca. 2100 BC divides itself into two categories: those kings who ruled before a great flood and those who ruled after it. One of the earliest examples of Sumero-Akkadian-Babylonian literature, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, describes a great flood sent as punishment by the gods, with humanity saved only when the pious Utnapishtim (a.k.a., “the Mesopotamian Noah”) builds a ship and saves the animal world thereon. A later Greek counterpart, the story of Deucalion and Phyrre, tells of a couple who survived a great flood sent by an angry Zeus. Taking refuge atop Mount Parnassus (a.k.a., “the Greek Ararat”), they supposedly repopulated the earth by heaving stones behind them that sprang into human beings.



The Flood—Babylonian-style. The *Gilgamesh Epic*, from 2000 BC, of which today we have numerous copies in different languages, contains an ancient Babylonian account of the Flood. The best copy, containing 200 lines in cuneiform on 12 clay tablets and dated to the seventh century BC, is in the British Museum. The tablet describing the Flood, number 11, was found at Nineveh in 1873 by George Smith, an expert in the Babylonian language who worked at the British Museum, as part of Assyrian King Ashurbanipal’s library. The epic describes a wise man, warrior and great builder—Gilgamesh, king of Uruk—who was also part god and part man. Tablet 11 tells of his visit to the Babylonian Noah, Utnapishtim, who told him about a great Flood, the ark he constructed and the people he saved. He also told about animals taken on the ark, landing on a mountain, sending out birds and offering sacrifices afterward. Similarities with the Biblical account suggest they are describing the same event.

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The Code of Hammurabi

This seven-foot black diorite stele, discovered at Susa and presently in the Louvre museum, contains 282 engraved laws of Babylonian King Hammurabi (fl. 1750 BC). The common basis for this law code is the *lex talionis* (“the law of the tooth”), showing that there was a common Semitic law of retribution in the ancient Near East, which is clearly reflected in the Pentateuch. For example, Exodus 21:23–25 reads: *But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,...* etc.

The Nuzi Tablets

The some 20,000 cuneiform clay tablets discovered at the ruins of Nuzi, east of the Tigris River and datable to ca. 1500 BC, reveal institutions, practices, and customs very congruent to those found in Genesis. These include treaties, marriage arrangements, rules regarding inheritance, adoption, and the like.

The Existence of Hittites

Genesis 23:7 ff. reports Abraham burying Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah, which he purchased from Ephron the Hittite. 2 Samuel 11 tells of David’s adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. A century ago, however, the Hittites were unknown outside of the Old Testament, and critics claimed that they were a figment of Biblical imagination. But in 1906, archaeologists digging east of Ankara, Turkey, discovered the ruins of Hattusas, the ancient Hittite capital at what is today called Boghazkoy, as well as its vast collection of Hittite historical records, which showed an empire flourishing in the mid second millennium BC. Another critical challenge—among many others—immediately proved worthless, a pattern that would often be repeated in the decades to come.

The Merneptah Stele

A 2.1 m (7 ft) slab engraved with hieroglyphics, also called the “Israel Stele,” boasts of the Egyptian pharaoh’s conquest of Libyans and peoples in Palestine, including the Israelites: “Israel—his seed is not.” This is the earliest reference to Israel in non-Biblical sources, and demonstrates that, as of ca. 1230 BC, the Hebrews were already living in the Promised Land.

Biblical Cities Attested Archaeologically

In addition to Jericho, places like Haran, Hazor, Dan, Megiddo, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Gezer, Gibeah, Beth Shemesh, Beth Shean, Beersheba, Lachish, and many other urban sites have been excavated, quite apart from such larger and obvious locations as Jerusalem or Babylon. Such geographical markers are very significant in demonstrating

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that *fact* is intended in the Old Testament historical narratives, not fantasy. Otherwise, the specificity involving these urban sites would have been replaced by “Once upon a time” narratives with only hazy geographical parameters, if any.



Top of the Code of Hammurabi. The Babylonian king Hammurabi (standing, left), who ruled ca. 1792–1750 BC, receives a scepter and ring from the sun god Shamash (seated, right), the god of justice, in a ceremony commissioning Hammurabi to write a code of laws. Below the scene are Hammurabi’s 282 laws and an epilogue inscribed in cuneiform. The stela, 2.3 m (7.5 ft) high, was discovered by archaeologists in Susa, Iran, where it had been taken as booty by Elamites in ca. 1200 BC, possibly from Sippar in northern Babylonia. Many of the injunctions found in Hammurabi’s code are similar to Biblical laws.

Similarly, Israel’s enemies in the Hebrew Bible are not contrived but solidly historical. Among the most dangerous of these were the Philistines, the people for whom “Palestine” itself would be named. Their earliest depiction is on the Temple of Rameses III at Thebes, ca. 1150 BC, as “peoples of the sea” who invaded the Delta area and later the coastal plain of Canaan. The Pentapolis (five cities) they established—namely Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gaza, Gath, and Ekron—have all been excavated, at least in part, and some remain cities to this day. It would be well at this point to compare such precise urban evidence with the geographical sites *claimed* in the holy books of other religious systems, which often have no basis whatever in reality.

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Shishak's invasion of Judah

1 Kings 14 and 2 Chronicles 12 tell of Pharaoh Shishak's conquest of Judah in the fifth year of the reign of King Rehoboam, the brainless son of Solomon, and how Solomon's temple in Jerusalem was robbed of its treasures on that occasion. This victory is also commemorated in hieroglyphic wall carvings on the Temple of Amon at Thebes.



Michael Ledford

Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Rameses III, Pharaoh of Egypt ca. 1184–1153 BC, in West Thebes. The ancient name of the temple was “Mansion of Millions of Years of King Rameses III, ‘United with Eternity in the Estate of Amon’.” It is the best preserved of a series of such temples on the west bank at Thebes. One of Rameses III's greatest achievements was the prevention of a coalition of “Sea Peoples,” among them the Philistines, from entering Egypt in his eighth year, ca. 1177 BC. To the east (left) is the entry, or first, pylon. The written record of Rameses' battle with the Sea Peoples is preserved on the outer wall of the second pylon, the longest hieroglyphic inscription known. A graphic record of the encounter is carved on the outer face of the north wall of the temple (visible in the photo), west of the second pylon. Depicted are both a sea battle, which undoubtedly took place at the mouth of the Pleusaic (eastern) branch of the Nile, and a land battle. The scenes vividly portray the Egyptian navy and army, the Philistines and other tribes of the Sea Peoples, and all their accoutrements, as they appeared in ca. 1177 BC, the time of Gideon (Jgs 6–8).

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A portion of the record of Shishak's Palestinian campaign carved on the wall of the Temple of Amun in Karnak, ancient Thebes. Shishak invaded the kingdoms of Judah and Israel in ca. 925 BC and commissioned a huge triumphal relief to commemorate the event. The portion shown in the photo depicts the god Amun leading captive cities by ropes. Each city is represented by a cartouche (oval), with the name of the city written inside, topped by the upper body of a bound Israelite captive. Well over 100 names are preserved in the list, most of them in the Negev. In addition to Judahite cities, Israelite cities are listed as well, showing that the campaign was directed against both the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Regrettably, many of the Judahite place names are missing due to damage, including the name Jerusalem.

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The Moabite Stone, or Mesha Stele, telling of the Moabite king Mesha’s revolt against Jehoram king of Israel in the mid-ninth century BC. It uses the same language, terminology and phraseology as the Old Testament. The text mentions *Yahweh*, the special name for Israel’s God in the Old Testament, the earliest recorded instance outside the Bible. Calling Chemosh the national god of Moab and mentioning three Biblical kings, including David in the phrase “House of David,” and 13 Biblical towns, Mesha’s inscription reads like a chapter from the Bible. The stela was discovered in Dhibon, Jordan, in 1868. Broken up by local villagers, 60 percent of the text was recovered and the remaining reconstructed based on an impression made before it was destroyed. This Bible-verifying text is now on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

The Moabite Stone

2 Kings 3 reports that Mesha, the king of Moab, rebelled against the king of Israel following the death of Ahab, and this three-foot stone slab, also called the Mesha Stele, confirms this in claiming triumph over Ahab’s family, ca. 850 BC, and that Israel had “perished forever.”

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Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

In 2 Kings 9–10, Jehu is mentioned as King of Israel (841–814 BC). That the growing power of Assyria was already encroaching on the northern kings prior to their ultimate conquest in 722 BC is demonstrated by a 2 m (6.5 ft) black obelisk discovered in the ruins of the palace at Nimrud in 1846. On it, Jehu is shown kneeling before Shalmaneser III and offering tribute to the Assyrian king, the only relief we have to date of a Hebrew monarch.



Michael Luddeni

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser is a four-sided block of polished black basalt found in the British Museum today. Discovered by Henry Layard at Nimrud (Caleh), Iraq, it is dated to about 840 BC and records a series of triumphs during the first 35 years of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III's reign. Each of the four sides is carved with five registers depicting people in different types of clothing, apparently representing different countries the king controlled. They are bringing costly articles of tribute and exotic animals as offerings to the king. The scenes are explained by almost 200 lines of cuneiform text. On one side, the second register from the top shows a man kneeling before the Assyrian king and the accompanying inscription says, "Tribute of Jehu son of Omri." Although neither king Shalmaneser nor this meeting between the two men is mentioned in the Bible, both Jehu and Omri are. And while Jehu is not literally Omri's son, it is understandable why the Assyrians thought so. Jehu assassinated Israelite king Joram, the son of king Omri, then took the throne of Israel. Beyond its artistic value and historical significance, the Black Obelisk gives us the only contemporary depiction of an Israelite king, or any Israelite, named in the Old Testament.

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ABR file photo

Siloam Inscription, accidentally discovered by a schoolboy in 1880, tells of the completion of “Hezekiah’s Tunnel.” A Greek who hoped to become rich by selling the inscription chopped it out of the rock in 1890 and broke it. Turkish authorities, who ruled Jerusalem at the time, confiscated the valuable document and subsequently sent it to Istanbul. It tells how two parties, each starting at opposite ends of the tunnel, met in the middle: “On the day of the breach, the excavators struck, each man to meet his co-worker, pick-axe against pick-axe. Then the water flowed from the spring to the pool.” Adventurous visitors can walk through the winding tunnel, located in the City of David south of the Temple Mount.

Burial Plaque of King Uzziah

Down in Judah, King Uzziah ruled from 792–740 BC, a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. Like Solomon, he began well and ended badly. In 2 Chronicles 26, his sin is related which resulted in his being struck with leprosy later in life, and when he died, he was interred in a “field of burial that belonged to the kings.” His stone burial-plaque has been discovered on the Mount of Olives, and it reads: “Here, the bones of Uzziah, King of Judah, were brought. Do not open.”

Hezekiah’s Siloam Tunnel Inscription

King Hezekiah of Judah ruled from 721 to 686 BC, and, fearing a siege by the Assyrian Sennacherib, he preserved Jerusalem’s water supply by having a tunnel cut through 534 m (1750 ft) of solid rock from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam inside the city walls (2 Kgs 20; 2 Chr 32). At the Siloam end of the tunnel, an inscription, presently in the archaeological museum at Istanbul, celebrates this remarkable accomplishment. The tunnel is probably the only Biblical site that has not changed its appearance in 2, 700 years.

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“Like a bird in a cage.” In 1830, British Colonel R. Taylor discovered a six-sided clay prism inscribed in cuneiform at Nineveh. Known today as Taylor’s Prism and sitting in the British Museum, it recorded Sennacherib’s first eight military campaigns. During his third campaign, in 701 BC, he besieged Jerusalem and mentioned the king of Judah, saying, “Hezekiah...I made a prisoner in Jerusalem in his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.” Interestingly, the same event is also recounted three times in the Bible (2 Kgs 19; 2 Chr 32; Is 36–37). While Sennacherib was capturing cities all over Philistia, Phoenicia and Palestine, by his own admission he did not take Jerusalem. In fact, at his palace at Nineveh, Sennacherib highlighted this campaign by depicting his capture of Lachish, one of Hezekiah’s cities. Why didn’t he depict his capture of Jerusalem? Because he didn’t take it! Why didn’t he take it? He doesn’t say—but the Bible does. With Sennacherib’s troops surrounding the city, God said, “I will defend this city, and save it, for my sake” (2 Kgs 19:34). And He did! Even Sennacherib’s own annals attest to it!

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The Sennacherib Prism

After having conquered the ten northern tribes of Israel, the Assyrians moved southward to do the same for Judah (2 Kgs 18–19). The prophet Isaiah, however, told Hezekiah that God would protect Judah and Jerusalem against Sennacherib (2 Chr 32; Is 36–37). Assyrian records virtually confirm this. The cuneiform on a hexagonal, 38 cm (15 in) baked clay prism found at the Assyrian capital of Nineveh describes Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BC, in which it claims that the Assyrian king shut Hezekiah inside Jerusalem "like a caged bird." However, like the Biblical record, it does *not* state that he conquered Jerusalem, which the prism certainly would have done had this been the case. In fact, the Assyrians bypassed Jerusalem on their way to Egypt, and the city would not fall until the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians. Sennacherib himself returned to Nineveh and was murdered by his own sons.

The Cylinder of Cyrus the Great

2 Chronicles 36:23 and Ezra 1 report that Cyrus the Great of Persia, after conquering Babylon, permitted Jews in the Babylonian Captivity to return to their homeland. Isaiah had even prophesied this (Is 44:28). This tolerant policy of the founder of the Persian Empire is borne out by the discovery of a 23 cm (9 in) clay cylinder found at Babylon from the time of its conquest, 539 BC, which reports Cyrus' victory and his subsequent policy of permitting Babylonian captives to return to their homes and even rebuild their temples.

And so it goes. This list of correlations between Old Testament texts and the hard evidence of Near Eastern archaeology could easily be tripled in length. When it comes to the inter-testamental and New Testament eras, as we might expect, the needle on the gauge of positive correlations simply goes off the scale.

Conclusions

In view of the overwhelming evidence, to banner an article in *Harper's* "False Testament" when referring to the Hebrew Bible is clearly an outrage. A cartoon in that article, showing the Bible being eaten away with vast corridors cut through its text, is an appropriately false caricature to go with the rest of the article.

Yet this is very typical of the way Biblical matters are reported in today's media. An extraordinary archeological discovery that *confirms* the Biblical record barely gets any notice in the press, as witness the bones of the first Biblical personality ever discovered in November, 1990. Generally, only one in a hundred know that the remains of Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest who indicted Jesus before Pontius Pilate on Good Friday, were

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found at that time in an ossuary in the Peace Forest of Jerusalem south of the Temple area. But let sensation-seeking writers claim that the patriarchs were mythical, that David never existed, that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, or that God predicted the assassination of Israeli premier Itzhaak Rabin through some arcane Bible code (yet did nothing about it), and the press covers it sympathetically and in full. In no way is this fair, ethical, or even logical.

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Cyrus, king of Persia, captured the city of Babylon in 539 BC, and subsequently took control of the entire Babylonian empire. Known in history as Cyrus the Great, his policies suggested an element of benevolence and tolerance. In a significant reversal of Assyrian and Babylonian practice, he returned exiled people to their homelands and restored their gods. As relating to the Jews, King Cyrus' edict is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36, Ezra 1 and 6. Here, it speaks of him returning the Jews to Judah to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem. Hormuzd Rassam made few significant discoveries during his excavation at Babylon during the early 1880's. But he did find a baked clay cylinder inscribed in cuneiform. It was Cyrus' own record of his conquest of the city of Babylon. It also told of his decision to return people to their lands and reestablish their own religions. In the British Museum today, it is known as the Cyrus Cylinder. While confirming the already well-known historical account of Babylon's fall, the Cyrus Cylinder also speaks of his policy to return people to their homelands and their gods, a historical fact known elsewhere only in the Bible.

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A first century AD family tomb accidentally discovered in Jerusalem in 1990, contained 12 bone boxes with the remains of 63 individuals. Technically called ossuaries (from the Greek word *osteon*—"bone"), each box was hollowed from a single limestone block. A popular form of reburial in Jerusalem during New Testament times, family members placed the deceased's bones within the box inside the tomb a year after death. Rabbis had declared that people who shared a bed in life could share an ossuary in death, and bone boxes often contain remains of multiple individuals. While most ossuaries were plain, many were beautifully and professionally decorated. Yet inscriptions identifying the deceased were unprofessionally scrawled in charcoal or incised almost anywhere on the ossuary. The deceased's name (and occasionally details about his family, place or age) was written in Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew. One beautifully decorated ossuary from this Jerusalem family tomb, seen here, had an unprofessionally scratched name on its top and side—"Joseph son of (or family of) Caiaphas." The Jewish historian, Josephus, said this was the full name of Israel's high priest for 18 years. The Bible identified him as the high priest that arrested Jesus. Inside this ossuary were the remains of six different individuals, one a 60-year old male. Almost certainly the high priest himself, these are the first physical remains ever discovered of anyone named in the Bible.

Nor is the press alone in this deception. Radical revisionist Biblical scholars and pseudo-scholars, like members of the notorious Jesus Seminar, are well aware of this sad sensationalizing formula for success and exploit it regularly. Admittedly, this may be impugning the motives of some in that category who are driven instead by an *Angst* to be "politically correct" when it comes to Biblical scholarship, that is, to be ultra-critical of

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anything Biblical. In this connection, *secular* historians of the ancient world often have a much higher opinion of the reliability of Biblical sources than some Biblical scholars themselves. Sad.

Lest these strictures be written off as the maunderings of some conservative curmudgeon, however, this critique in fact represents the *majority* view in Biblical scholarship today. University of Arizona archaeologist William Dever, for example, is well known for his objection to the term “Biblical archaeology” since it seems to convey a pro-Biblical bias in its very name. Yet he assails some of the unwarranted conclusions of Biblical minimalists in a strongly-worded article in *Biblical Archaeology Review*: “Save Us from Postmodern Malarkey.” Nor does he have kind words for the minimalists in his book, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* “I suggest,” he writes, “that the revisionists are nihilist not only in the historical sense but also in the philosophical and moral sense” (Govier 2003:38).

Similarly, *BAR*, which provides the literary arena for the traditionalist vs. minimalist battles and tries to keep a neutral stance in the process, found the *Harper’s* article “...only one side of a very hot debate in the field. Nowhere does [the author] try to evaluate the merits of the other side’s case. In fact he gives no indication that he’s even aware there is another side” (Feldman 2002:6).

Accordingly, let the debate continue, but let *all* the evidence be admitted. Ever since scientific archaeology started a century and a half ago, the consistent pattern has been this: the hard evidence from the ground has borne out the Biblical record again and again—and again. The Bible has nothing to fear from the spade.

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